

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** November 12, 2015

**Agenda Item:** Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area Timber Sale

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to enhance forest habitat on approximately 340 acres of the Blackfoot Clearwater WMA. The treatments would enhance aspen habitats, open canopy for improved forage production, and would improve forest resiliency by reducing fire risk and beetle infestation risk. Treatments would include salvage logging of mountain pine beetle infected trees, commercial thinning, fuels reduction (thinning, piling, and burning), and removal of encroaching conifers within aspen groves. The project would be designed to minimize impacts to big game security and hiding cover.

Contingent on environmental assessment and approval processes, including final approval from the Commission, FWP would initiate this project in the summer of 2016 with the intent to complete in 2017. This project is consistent with statutory requirements of MCA 87-1-622 to “address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife enhancement...” Timely salvage is an important feature of this project, which could offset the costs of the fuels reduction and aspen enhancement components of the project. Most dead trees no longer have value as saw logs and their value as pulp logs is diminishing.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Upon preliminary approval, FWP will complete further analysis and obtain public input in the form of a draft environmental assessment and associated public review.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

No action would retain dead and downed fuel while the commercial value would continue to diminish to a point where treatment would no longer pay for itself. Additionally, thinning of dense Douglas-fir stands would not occur and stands would continue to accumulate greater fuel loads over time. Conifers would not be removed from aspen stands and would continue to out-compete aspen. Future mountain pine beetle risk would not be mitigated and risk of mortality would be higher if another mountain pine beetle epidemic occurs.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission provide preliminary approval, which would allow FWP to develop a more detailed proposal and conduct public involvement for the proposed treatments. Implementing the proposed treatments would enhance aspen and forage production for big game while providing more certainty of a desirable outcome in the event of a fire or mountain pine beetle epidemic.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve for further analysis and public comment these proposed forest treatments on the Blackfoot Clearwater WMA.